



The Prophet's ﷺ Parents Are Saved ¹

Imām Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī

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This writing concerns the question of the ruling (hukm) that the father and mother of the Prophet ﷺ are (believed to be) saved and not in Hellfire. This has been declared by the majority of the scholars, and in reaching that declaration they have several methods (masālik).

FIRST

His parents died before he was sent as Prophet, and there is no punishment for them as **“We never punish until We send a messenger (and they reject him)”** (17:15). Our Ashʿarī Imāms of those in *kalām*, *usūl*, and Shāfiʿī *fiqh* agree on the statement that one who dies while *daʿwā* has not reached him, dies saved. This has been defined by Imām Shāfiʿī . . . and some of the *fuqahāʾ* have explained that the reason is that that person is on *fiṭra* (primordial disposition), and has not stubbornly refused nor rejected any Messenger.

That is the position of our Shaykh, Shaykh al-Islām Sharafuddīn al-Munāwī, as I received it. He was once asked whether the Prophet’s father was in the fire and he groaned loudly at the questioner. The latter insisted: “Is his Islām established?” and he answered that he died in *fiṭra* and quoted the verse.

It is the position of Ahl al-Sunnah and it was opposed by the *Muʿtazila* and those who follow them among those who say that one is condemned because Allāh is known rationally.

It is also the position of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī who said,

The (proper) conjecture (*ẓann*) concerning his parents, meaning also all those who died before his Messengership, is that they shall obey (his call) at the time of their examination (in the grave), as a gift (from Allāh) to please him.

This method is based on the following sources:

¹ Imām al-Suyūṭī wrote no less than five *fatāwa* on this topic. What is translated here by Shaykh Gibril has been excerpted from his treatise entitled: **“Methods Of Those With Pure Belief Concerning The Parents Of The Prophet”** (*Masālik al-Hunafāʾ fi walidayy al-Mustafā*)

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[Evidence from the Qur'ān]

- The aforementioned verse. (17:15)
- The verse, ***“Your Lord does not unjustly (bi zulm) destroy the townships while their people are unconscious (of the wrong they do)”*** (6:131). Al-Zarkashī adduced it to illustrate the rule (*qā`ida*) that one thanks Allāh through hearing (about Him), not through rational induction.²
- The verse, ***“Otherwise . . . they might say, Our Lord! Why sentest Thou no messenger unto us, that we might have followed Thy revelations and be among the believers?”*** (28:47) Adduced by Zarkashi and Ibn Abi Hātim in their tafsīrs. The latter adds the Hadīth, “Those who die in fitra will say, My Lord, no book nor messenger reached me, and he recited this verse.” (Bukhārī and Muslim)
- The verse, ***“And if We had destroyed them with some punishment before it [your coming], they would assuredly have said: Our Lord! If only Thou hadst sent unto us a messenger, so that we might have followed . . .”*** (20:134)
- ***“And never did thy Lord destroy the townships, till He had raised up in their mother-town a Messenger reciting unto them Our revelations. And never did We destroy the townships unless the folks thereof were evil-doers”*** (28:59). Ibn Abī Hātim quotes Ibn `Abbās’s and Qatāda’s explanations that it refers to the people of Mecca, who were condemned only after the Prophet ﷺ was sent to them and they denied him.
- ***“Lest ye should say, the Scripture was only revealed to two sects before us, and we in sooth were unaware of what they read”*** (6:156).
- ***“And We destroyed no townships but it had its warners for reminder, for We never were oppressors”*** (26:208-209). `Abd ibn Hāmid, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Hātim quote Qatāda in their tafsīrs to the effect that revelation, proof, and exhortation must precede condemnation.
- ***“And they cry for help there, (saying), Our Lord! Release us; we will do right, not (the wrong) that we used to do. Did not We grant you a life long enough for him who reflected to reflect therein? And the warner came unto you”*** (35:37). The commentators said, “The warner is the Prophet ﷺ.”

² Yūsuf `Alī translates *bi zulm* as “for their wrongdoing” and attributes it to the object (the people) not the subject (Allāh). This produces the following meaning: “Thy Lord would not destroy for their wrongdoing men’s habitations whilst their occupants were unwarned.” Qurtubī mentions both meanings in his Tafsīr.

[Evidence from the Hadīth]

Hadith Concerning the Examination of the People of fitra [Primordial Disposition] on the Day of Resurrection and the Entry into Paradise of Those Who Obey and the Entry into the Fire of Those Who Disobey:

Ahmad, Ibn Rahawayh, Ibn Mardawayh, and Bayhaqī (*al-I'tiqād `alā madhhab al-salaf ahl al-sunnah wa-l-jamā`ah*) who said, *sahīh* through Aswad ibn Sari'. The Prophet ﷺ said,

Four will present excuses on the Day of Resurrection: The deaf one, the idiot, the senile old man, and the one who died in *fitra*. The first will say, I didn't hear anything; the second, Islām came and street-children were throwing dung at me; the third, Islām came and I did not have my wits about me, and the fourth, my Lord, no Messenger came to me. Allāh will Himself take their covenant to obey Him. They will be told to enter the fire (as a test). Those who obey will find it cool and safe, while those who refuse will be dragged to it. (Aswad, Abū Hurayra)

Al-Bazzār and Tirmidhī who correctly graded it *hasan*: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The one who died in *fitra*, the imbecile, and the infant will say respectively: No Book or Messenger reached me; You gave me no mind wherewith to understand good or evil; I did not have a chance to do anything. A fire will be presented to them and they will be told to enter it. Those who would have done well in life will obey and enter it (temporarily) while those who would have disobeyed in life will refuse. Allāh will tell them, You disobey Me (seeing Me), so how could you obey My Messengers in My absence? (Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī)

Al-Bazzār and Abū Ya'la: same as above with the addition of the senile old man. Those who obey and enter the fire will go across it speedily. (Anas)

`Abdul Razzāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Hātim, with an authentic chain that meets the criteria of Bukhārī and Muslim: The Prophet ﷺ said,

“The one who died in *fitra*, the idiot, the deaf, the mute, and the senile will be sent a messenger (at that time) who will say, Enter the fire. They will argue and say: How can it be when no messenger reached us? But woe to them! If they had entered it they would have found it cool and safe. Whoever accepts and obeys will enter it.” Abū Hurayra added, Read, **“We never punish until We send a messenger”** (17:15).”

Al-Bazzār and Hākim, who graded it *sahīh* by the criteria of Bukhārī and Muslim: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The people of *Jābiliyya* will come on the Day of Judgment carrying their idols on their backs. Allāh will question them and they will say: Our Lord, You did not send us a Messenger and nothing from You reached us. If you had sent us one, we would have been your most obedient servants. Allāh will say, Shall I test your obedience? And He will tell them to enter the fire and stay in it. They will enter it and return again, in fear of its fury and exhalations, and they will say, Our Lord, protect us from it. He will say: Didn't you promise to obey Me if I ordered you something? They will pledge again and enter it, only to come back and plead again. The Prophet ﷺ said, Had they stayed in it the first time, they would have found it cool and safe. (Thawbān)

Tabarānī and Abū Nu’aym: The Prophet ﷺ said,

The imbecile will come on the Day of Judgment together with the one who died in fitra and the infant etc. (same as (e)) They will keep coming back although the fire would not have hurt them, and Allāh will say, I knew your actions from afore, so take them (O Fire).³

Comment of Tabarī,

Know that the *Ahl al-Sunnah* have one and all agreed on the fact that there is no knowledge of rulings except on the basis of revealed Law as opposed to the productions of the mind, while opponents of the truth such as the Rafidah [Rejecters of the legitimacy of the first three Caliphs], the *Karramiyyah* [anthropomorphists], the Mu’tazila [rationalists] and others consider that the derivation of rulings have different bases, some revealed, some based on pure reasoning. As for us [*Ahl al-Sunnah*], we say that nothing is ruled as obligatory before the coming of a Prophet ﷺ.

Imām Fakhruddīn Rāzī said in the *Mabsūl*,

To be thankful to the One Creator is not a mind-based obligation, contrary to what the Mu’tazila say. If it were, those who leave that action before a Prophet ﷺ is sent to them would be punished, which is not the case [citing 17:15].

Similarly, those of his school [i.e. *kalām*] as well as Baydawī and Tājuddīn Subkī said,

We believe that those whom *da’wa* did not reach die saved, and that while alive they are not fought against until they reject a clear call, and that they enjoy protection in their life and possessions, etc.

Now this method of ruling (exemption from punishment), does it apply to all the people of the *Jahiliyya*? No, rather it applies specifically to those who have never been reached by the call of a previous Prophet ﷺ. As for those who have been reached and who have rejected that previous Prophet ﷺ, no one disputes that they are definitely (ruled to be) in the fire.

The noble parents (of the Prophet ﷺ), from what has been known of them, belong to the former group according to our belief.

No call reached them, because the previous Prophet ﷺ came about six hundred years earlier, and of the rare divines (*abbār*) of the People of the Book who still knew the (original) prophetic dispensations and called people to the religion, a tiny remnant were left dispersed here and there between Sham and other places.

They apparently travelled little and lived brief lives: eighteen years for `Abdullāh who died in Medina, and nearly the same for the reclusive Amīna, according to the hāfiz al-`Alā’ī in his book, *al-durra al-saniyya fi mawlid sayyid al-bariyya* (The pristine pearl: the birth of the Master of Creatures).

They knew no better than the majority of the people of Mecca, whose ignorance even of the fact that Allāh sends prophets is shown in the verses, **“Does Allāh send a human**

³ The Hadīths of Muslim on the Prophet’s father and mother are addressed later.

Messenger?” (17:94) and ***“They said, if our Lord wished, He would have sent angels; we never heard the like from our forefathers”*** (23:24).

Imām ‘Izzuddīn ibn ‘Abdul Salām said (in *al-Amālī*),

Every Prophet was sent to his own particular people except ours, which means that every people not previously sent to, is of the *ḥitrah*, except the descendants of a Prophet that are born in other nations [e.g. the descendants of Ibrāhīm leading to Shu‘ayb], because his Law addresses them as well. But if the previous dispensation becomes obliterated, then all people become people of the *ḥitrah*.” This is categorical proof that the noble parents are without doubt of the *ḥitrah*, because they are neither descendants of ‘Isā nor of his nation.

We now turn to further proofs from the Hadīth. Ibn Hajar’s statement that the correct conjecture is that the Prophet’s entire family will obey when asked on Judgment Day is inferred from these sources:

The Hadīth related by al-Hākim in the *Mustadrak* from Ibn Mas‘ūd and graded authentic, that:

A young man of the Ansār who asked a lot of questions once asked the Prophet ﷺ, “Are your parents in the Fire?” To which the Prophet ﷺ answered, “My Lord promised to give me what I ask concerning them, and on that day I shall stand at the Praiseworthy Station (of chief intercessor).”

The Hadīth cited by Ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī from Ibn ‘Abbās to the effect that the verse ***“And your Lord shall give you so that you will be pleased”*** (93:5) alludes to the Prophet’s pleasure that none of his family enter the fire.

The Hadīth of Abū Sa‘īd in *Sharaf al-nubuwwa*, Tabarī (*Dhakha’ir al-Uqba*), and al-Mulla in his *Sīra* from ‘Umrān ibn Husayn:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “I asked my Lord that He not enter any of my family into the fire and it was granted me.”

Tamīm al-Dārī in the *Fawa'id* with a weak isnād from Ibn ‘Umar:

The Prophet ﷺ said, “On the Day of Judgment I shall intercede for my father and mother, my uncle Abū Tālib, and a [milk-]brother of mine from the Jahiliyya.” Tabarī said, If established, then it is understood in the light of the authentic Hadīths concerning Abū Tālib [i.e. that he is in a shallow fire = Bukhārī and Muslim]. Tabarī said “concerning Abū Tālib” in view of the fact that Islām did reach him unlike the other three who died in *ḥitrah*.⁴

⁴ Other similar Hadīths follow in descending order of authenticity, but which Suyūṭī adduces nonetheless to build up the strength of the evidence that the explicit intercession of the Prophet ﷺ for his parents is true.

[Lack of Proof That His Parents Were Not of the Pure Religion (*Hanifiyya*) and Weakening of the Hadīth Whereby His Father is in the Fire]

SECOND

The *shirk* (idolatry) of the Prophet's parents is not an established fact and that they more probably followed the Pure Religion (*Hanifiyya*) of their ancestor Ibrāhīm. A group of Arabs did that, such as `Amr ibn Nufayl and Waraqā ibn Nawfal and others. This is the view of Imām Fakhruddīn al-Rāzī and others named below.

Al-Rāzī states in *asrār al-tanzīl* that some scholars have said that Azar was not Ibrāhīm's father but his uncle because, among other proofs, the parents of prophets are not unbelievers. Proving the latter, is the verse, “[*Your Lord*] *Who sees you when you stand, and your turning (taqallubak) among those who prostrate themselves*” (26:218-219), i.e. your descent through the loins of your ancestors, who are called: worshippers.

He continued: And what proves that the Prophet's parents were not idolaters is his saying, “I was carried from the loins of the pure men into the wombs of the pure women” (*lam aḡal unqal . . .*) Therefore it is necessary that none of his ancestors be a *mushrik*.

The above is verbatim what Imām Rāzī said, and I remind you of his status as the Imām of *Ahl al-Sunnah* among his contemporaries, the principal upholder of belief against the various sects of innovators, the one who defended the truth of the Ash`arī creed in his time, and the *Mujaddid* (renewer) of this *Ummah* in the sixth century. ⁵

I say also, what further establishes the truth of this method and of what Imām al-Rāzī said is, first, the authentic Hadīths to the effect that the Prophet's origins are the best in every respect from Adam to his father `Abdullāh, and that his century is the best; second, the Hadīths to the effect that the earth is never empty of the True Monotheists (*muwabbhidūn*) from Adam until Judgment Day, and that it is for their sake that the earth is preserved otherwise it would have perished long ago. These two points categorically prove that the best origins and the true monotheists are first and foremost the parents of the prophets as it ill fits that they should be *mushriks* while other people be considered of the *fitra*. ⁶

⁵ These words by Suyūṭī make plain the deviation of “Salafī” charlatans who insinuate that he was not an Ash`arī or that al-Rāzī does not represent *Ahl al-Sunnah* or that his Tafsīr is not representative of *Ahl al-Sunnah*! See for example the disparaging mention of al-Rāzī and of his monumental Tafsīr in Manī` al-Qattān's book published in Riyadh at *dar al-sa`ūdiyya lil-nashr*, entitled: *mabāhiṭh fi `ulūm al-Qur`an* (1391/1971).

⁶ Suyūṭī then cites about 44 Hadīths *sahīh* or *hasan* to illustrate the two points above.

Another perspective which verifies that method is the verse whereby Allāh keeps *tawhīd* - knowledge of Oneness - within the posterity of Ibrāhīm. [He cites verses, commentaries, and Hadīths to that effect.]

Further probative views are that of Imām Abū al-Hasan al-Mawardī in *A`lam al-nubūnwa* who said,

The light of prophecy was present in the Prophet's parents, and the Prophet ﷺ had no partner in inheriting it, that is, no brother and no sister, because the quintessence (*safwa*) of his parents resides in him, and the greatness of their lineage (*nasab*) is derived from him alone, and that is also why they died young.

Further, Ibn al-Jawzī enumerates in *al-Talqīb* the names of nine who refused to worship idols in the time of the Jahiliyya: Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, Zayd ibn `Amr ibn Nufayl, `Abdullāh ibn Jahsh, `Uthmān ibn al-Huwayrith, Waraqā ibn Nawfal, Rabab ibn al-Barrā', As`ad ibn Kurayb al-Humayrī, Qass ibn Sa`ida al-Iyādī, Abū Qays ibn Sarma.

Now for the objections that:

Muslim narrated on the authority of Anas:

A man said, O Messenger of Allāh, where is my father?" He said: "In the fire." When the man left he called him back and said, "Verily my father and your father are in the fire."⁷

Muslim and Abū Dawūd narrated on Abū Hurayra's authority:

That the Prophet asked permission to ask forgiveness for his mother and it was not granted him [and he asked permission to visit her grave and it was granted].⁸

I say: Yes (they did narrate it) and the answer is that the narrators do not agree on the words, "Verily my father and your father are in the fire." The chain that Muslim used is that of Hammād ibn Salāma - from Thābit - from Anas. It is contradicted by the chain of Mu`ammar - from Thābit - (from Anas), which does not mention those words, but which says, "He called him back and said, "When you pass by the grave of an unbeliever, tell him of the fire."

There is no mention of the Prophet's father in the latter version whatsoever, and its chain is more established (*athbāt*) as Mu`ammar is more established than Hammād, whose memory has been questioned and some of whose narrations have been rejected. Bukhārī did not take anything from him, nor did Muslim in the *usūl* (Hadīths related to the principles of the Sharī`ah) except through Thābit. Mu`ammar is impeccable from all those points of view and both Bukhārī and Muslim use him. His version is therefore more reliable.

⁷ Muslim, *Imān*, chapter 88

⁸ Muslim, *Janā'iz*, chapter 36

The Hadīth also comes through another chain in a wording similar to the version of Mu`ammar:

Al-Bazzār, Tabarānī, and Bayhaqī cite it on the authority of Ibrāhīm ibn Sa`d - from al-Zuhrī - from `Amr ibn Sa`d - from his father, that:

A Bedouin Arab said to the Prophet ﷺ, “Where is my father?” He answered, “In the fire.” The man said, “And where is yours?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Whenever you pass by the grave of an unbeliever, tell him about the fire.”

The above chain is authentic according to the criteria of Bukhārī and Muslim: reliance upon it therefore takes precedence over any other (that does not meet such criterion). Tabarānī and Bayhaqī add that the Arab later entered Islām and said, “The Prophet ﷺ put a heavy burden on me, because I did not pass by a single grave of an unbeliever except I told him about the fire.” Ibn Mājah cites something similar through Ibrāhīm ibn Sa`d - from al-Zuhrī - from Sālim - from his father.

The above addition shows beyond doubt that the words spoken by the Prophet ﷺ had a general meaning, and that the Arab was given an order which he carried out all his life. In the first narration, however, he was not ordered anything. It is clear that the first narrator related it in the form he understood (incorrectly).

Al-Hākim in the *Mustadrak* narrates the following (*sahih*) on the authority of Luqayt ibn `Amr, that the latter went in a delegation comprising Nuhayk ibn `Asim ibn Mālik ibn al-Muntafiq to Medina to see the Prophet ﷺ. The latter asked,

Is there any good among those of us who were in Jahiliyya?” He said, “Your father al-Muntafiq is in the Fire.” Nuhayk said, “I thought an abyss had opened between the skin of my face and my very flesh when I heard him say that about my father in front of everyone. I wanted to say, What about yours, O Prophet, but I considered it more appropriate to say instead, What about your family, O Prophet?” The Prophet ﷺ answered, “Whenever you see the grave of an idolater, whether of the Quraysh or of `Amr, say, Muhammad sends me to you to tell you about the fire.”

The preceding is the clearest narration yet of what took place. Now, even if the words, “My father and your father” are established as authentic, this does not mean ‘Abdullah but Abū Tālib [cf. Bukhārī and Muslim’s narrations of the *dakhdakh* or shallow fire in which he is placed due to the Prophet’s intercession], similarly to what Imām Rāzī said about the Prophet Ibrāhīm calling his uncle: my father. This is clear from the fact that Abū Tālib commonly called his nephew “My son,” and that is how the Quraysh also called him when they said, “Tell your son to stop insulting our gods.”

It has also been stated in the Hadīth that the most leniently punished of the inmates of the fire is Abū Tālib [Bukhārī and Muslim]. If the Prophet’s parents were in the fire, surely they would be the ones to be punished the most leniently. The scholars of the principles of jurisprudence (*usūl*) call this an allusive proof (*dalālat al-ishāra*).

As for the second Hadīth: that the Prophet ﷺ was not allowed to pray at his mother’s grave, (it is authentic; however,) it must be explained correctly, since it is a rule of *usūl*

that whenever irrefutable proofs contradict an authentic Hadīth, that Hadīth must be interpreted in a way that clears the contradiction, and the proofs have precedence over it [i.e. it cannot be interpreted to mean that she is in the fire when it is proven otherwise].

The counter-argument may be made that in the beginning of Islām the Muslim who died with unpaid debts was not prayed upon (and asking forgiveness for them was not allowed). [This is still the case in Anatolia, where the *janāza* does not take place until all debts are paid on the spot.] The Prophet's mother may have had this or other reasons which prevented his praying upon her, which does not make her a *kāfira*.⁹

[Conclusion]

The majority of the scholars have agreed to the preceding, namely that the Prophet's parents are in Paradise, without need for them to consider the two Hadīths of Muslim abrogated. However, as al-Suhaylī has pointed out, it is not appropriate for Muslims to say such a thing as, "The Prophet's parents are in the fire," as he himself said, "Do not annoy the living by insulting the dead," and Allāh said, ***"Those who annoy Allāh and the Prophet, Allāh curses them in this life and in the hereafter"*** (33:57).

Al-Qādī Abū Bakr ibn al-`Arabī the Mālikī scholar was asked about the man who did say such a statement, and he replied, *"Such a man is cursed."*

Finally, a portion of the scholars have gone to the position of withholding their opinion on the subject, and Allāh knows best.



⁹ As for the Hadīth *"Your mother is in the Fire.... My mother is with your mother,"* it is very weak and, moreover, contains an indication that the Prophet's intercession may serve to bring them out of the Fire: *"Whatever I ask my Lord about the two of them [the Prophet's parents], I hope that He will give me. I shall stand, on that day, at the praiseworthy Station."*

This Hadīth is narrated from Ibn Mas'ūd by Ahmad, al-Tabarī in his Tafsīr, al-Hākim (2:365=1990 ed. 2:396), al-Dārimī (book of Riqāq), Abū al-Shaykh in al-`Azamā, and Ibn al-Mundhir, all with very weak chains because of `Uthmān ibn `Umayr who is disclaimed as a narrator (*munkar al-badīth*) cf. Shaykh Ahmad Shākir in his edition of the *Musnad* (4:31-32 §3787), al-Haythamī (10:361-362), and al-Dhahabī's rejection of al-Hākim's grading of authentic.